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TAGS: PREL PTER ECON PINR KWBG KPAL IS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS COUNTERTERRORISM GOI EXTERNAL

SUBJECT: MOD ADVISOR ON HAMAS, ABBAS, NEIGHBORS, IRAN AND
AL QAEDA

REF: TEL AVIV 0840

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz, reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

11. (S) Summary: Ministry of Defense Political Advisor Amos Gilad told NEA DAS Dibble that Israel was on a collision course with a new "Hamastan." He said the Hamas leadership was very clever and would seek international acceptance while retaining the intent to annihilate Israel. He agreed that Israel and the international community should support Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) at present, while doubting the strength of the Palestinian Authority President's messages to Hamas. Gilad highlighted the importance to Israel of stability in Jordan and Egypt, and commented on those countries' reactions to the recent Hamas election victory. While Gilad said that Iran would continue to support terror activities and infrastructure, he said he did not believe Iran would underwrite the PA budget. He mentioned an Egyptian report of a possible arrest of an Al Qaeda member in Gaza. End summary.

ISRAEL AND HAMAS ON COLLISION COURSE

12. (C) In a meeting with NEA DAS Dibble and the DCM at MOD February 23, MOD POLAD Amos Gilad said he saw Israel on a collision course with a "new Hamastan." The fact that Hamas did not have the support of a majority of those who voted would "only be a comfort to historians." Gilad said Hamas was being very clever in its efforts to form a coalition government. Ismail Haniyeh wanted to be both prime minister and head of security, Gilad said. He was not surprised at the political sophistication of the Hamas leadership. Hamas was seeking international recognition, the support of the Arab world, economic assistance, and to be seen as a movement and not just as being "at war with the world like Bin Laden." Gilad and DAS Dibble agreed that Hamas was looking to create flexibility for itself by hiding behind Fatah, technocrats, or independents who might be willing to join a coalition government. Gilad thought that Fatah would resist joining a Hamas-led coalition, but there might be exceptions, including some independents. He saw Azzam Ahmed as a potential member of a national unity government. He characterized Ahmed as a personal friend of Saddam Hussein, a supporter of suicide bombers, and a symbol of the deep cooperation between Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat. Dibble stated that "technocrat hood ornaments" would complicate the situation.

13. (C) Gilad said he realized that treating Erez and Karni as international crossings would cause suffering for Palestinians. He called the Rafah crossing "nice looking," but ineffective against terror. Gilad expected that security arrangements within a Hamas-led PA would be complex. Hamas would seek to remove nonworking Fatah members from security payrolls to effect good governance. Some elements will use "blackmail to improve conditions of employment," saying they would kill someone if not put on a payroll, Gilad said. Any non-Hamas security chief would be afraid of Hamas. In response to a question from DAS Dibble, Gilad said that Hamas had the capability to control Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Al Aqsa Brigades, but Hamas would never accept the appearance of any agreement with Israel. Gilad differentiated a hudna as "not an agreement", but as a "religious idea" open to violation whenever one of the parties feels strong enough. He said a tadiyah was less than a hudna, but as the present "pause" in violence had "worked," people were relatively happy. Gilad clearly believed that such moves by Hamas were purely tactical, saying that Hamas would "never" recognize Israel. He further said that Hamas considered Oslo as "subordinate to the national interests of the Palestinian people." Gilad stated that Hamas did not want to give up its own independent terror infrastructure.

GOI SUPPORTS ABU MAZEN BUT QUESTIONS HIS MESSAGE

14. (C) Gilad said that the messages Hamas was getting from Abbas were not strong enough. DAS Dibble and the DCM emphasized that the U.S. believed that Abbas' speech at the investiture of Parliament was very strong. Gilad replied that when the GOI put the speech together with other "public and non-public" messages from Abbas, the thrust was not so

clear. He feared that even the speech itself gave Hamas "room to maneuver." He opined that if Fatah did join Hamas in a coalition, that would pave the way for "at least four years" of Hamas rule. Dibble noted that key Fatah figures were holding the line. Gilad said "this is the most sensitive time," and said the U.S. needs to clarify to Abu Mazen that his message needs to be strong and consistent. He said PIJ and others were strengthening their capabilities. Speaking personally, he added, "we could find ourselves back in Gaza." In response to a question from Dibble, Gilad said the Hamas electoral victory would change the leadership dynamic between those in Damascus and those in the Palestinian territories. At the same time, the military wing would be "impatient for blood." Dibble stressed the importance of the period up to formation of a new government in the PA, saying it was important to squeeze Hamas and keep on the pressure, but also to avoid strengthening Hamas inadvertently. It was important to find and encourage the moderate center. Noting that ordinary Palestinians would feel the squeeze on Hamas, Gilad said that whoever got the combination of pressure on Hamas and support for moderates right "will get the Nobel prize." Dibble stressed the importance of supporting Abu Mazen, while recognizing his weaknesses. She raised the GOI decision to suspend transfer of customs receipts to the PA in advance of any change of government. Gilad said he was not involved in that "political decision," but then suggested that the way the U.S. took back the USD 50 million it had committed to the PA earlier "may have inspired" the GOI decision.

STABILITY OF JORDAN AND EGYPT CRITICAL TO ISRAEL

15. (C) Gilad commented on the Jordanian reaction to remarks by an Israeli general that King Abdullah might be the last Hashemite monarch to rule Jordan. The Jordanian Charge' had angrily demanded an apology from Minister of Defense Mofaz, but was later somewhat mollified by an MOD clarification that the general's remarks did not represent GOI views or policy. Gilad called Jordan "our only barrier with Zarqawi." Noting that Israel was in a bad neighborhood, he referred to Jordan and Egypt as the "good coalition." Jordan was being tougher than Gilad had expected, by not welcoming the Hamas leadership. For Jordan, the Hamas victory was an internal problem, Gilad said.

16. (C) Gilad said he sensed ambivalence from the Egyptian leadership. Mubarak's intentions were not clear. He was facing an earthquake in the Middle East. Gilad thought the parliamentary opposition would have been several times larger if the government had not influenced the recent election process. He was concerned about the succession in Egypt. Mubarak had not designated a deputy, his son had not performed well, and Soliman will turn 71 in July. The Egyptian wing of Al Qaeda was influencing Al Qaeda's overall direction, producing ideas that would make it stronger, including an emphasis on the Middle East, return to Moslem empire, differences with Zarqawi, and a direction towards becoming a political movement and not just carrying out violence. Gilad asked rhetorically, "Can you imagine Jordan as Hamastan? Egypt as the Moslem Brotherhood?" Commenting on recent events in the region, Gilad said, "We have to be careful of this 'democracy on the way to dictatorships.'"

IRAN FUNDS WILL FOCUS ON TERROR, NOT BUDGET SUPPORT

17. (C) Dibble asked whether Iran would be able to pass significant funds to Hamas. Gilad replied that "one dollar for terror goes a long way" (from Iran's standpoint); "five dollars to a corrupt PA does not go so far." The difference was between suitcases of cash for terror and significant funds for payrolls and hospitals. Iran would not give one billion dollars to the PA, Gilad said. Iran would want to "accelerate the terror," but at the same time an elected Islamist government "in the middle of the peace camp" was very good for Iran, Gilad said. Hamas would take economic moves to reduce its dependence on assistance. Dibble noted an estimate of 79,000 persons on security payrolls. Gilad said Hamas would gradually take over other people's guns after taking over the government and reducing the number of security personnel. On a separate point, Gilad said the Russian minister of defense had told the GOI he had "no doubt" that Iran had a plan to develop nuclear weapons.

AL QAEDA DEVELOPMENTS

18. (S) Gilad claimed that he had received some sensitive information from a senior Egyptian general following his February 21 meeting with the Ambassador (Ref). The Egyptian, he said, agreed with Gilad's estimation that, even though the Rafah crossing "looked nice," even "Zarkawi or Bin Laden"

could get through into Gaza. The Egyptian "let it slip" that a suspected member of Al Qaeda had entered Gaza and been arrested there. The general said the suspect was looking for American targets. The Egyptian claimed not to know the name of the individual, but promised to get Gilad more specific information. The Egyptian was also dubious that Egypt would be willing and able to put as many as 5,000 soldiers at the Gaza border to provide security and prevent terrorist intrusions, a proposal Gilad had discussed with other Egyptian officials during a recent visit to Egypt (Ref).

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JONES